

JEREMIAH 27

JEREMIAH WEARS A YOKE

Since Jeremiah the prophet could not persuade his countrymen to submit to God's precepts, and thereby to prevent the destruction of their own country by the king of Babylon; he is seen here, busily endeavoring to persuade them to submit to God's Providence by yielding tamely to the king of Babylon, and becoming tributaries to him – which was the wisest course that they could take at this point. It would be a mitigation of the calamity, for it would prevent the total destruction of their country by fire and sword. Although they would be required to sacrifice their liberties, they would still have their lives spared. In God's name, Jeremiah gave this counsel to his people during the early years of King Jehoiakim (c. 609 BC); and he also preached the same message to the kings of the neighboring nations around Judah. He encouraged them all to make the best of their bad situation, by willingly yielding themselves up to Nebuchadnezzar. He assured them that there was no remedy besides servitude to the king of Babylon; and yet, in due time, there would be relief – for Babylon's dominion would last no longer than 70 years (verses 1-11).

In order to give his audience a visible picture to illustrate the meaning of his words, Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to make “bonds and yokes” – that is, a yoke which consisted of two wooden beams fastened together by ropes. The prophet was to put this yoke upon his own neck; and then, by wearing it in public, he would be giving the people a visible sign that they were to submit to the government of the king of Babylon.

Again, in the days of King Zedekiah of Judah (c. 595 BC), Jeremiah repeated the same advice to him particularly (verses 12-15) – as well as to the priests and people. He told them that the king of Babylon would still advance against them until things were brought to the very last extremity, and he reminded them that a patient submission would be the only way to mitigate the calamity and make it somewhat easier to bear (verses 16-22). Thus, if the people would have only hearkened to him, Jeremiah would have directed them in the paths of true wisdom as well as of true piety.

The prophets were a large and influential class of respected men among the Jews. Their schools – dating back as far as the days of Samuel – had poured forth a succession of men who occupied a unique position of prominence in the land, as the representatives of Jehovah Himself. But in the degenerate days when the kingdom of Judah was rapidly tottering to its fall, these men seem to have been deeply infected by the prevailing vices of their time. No longer were they representatives of the Lord, and His mouthpieces through which His truth-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jeremiah encourages his people to willingly submit to Babylon – verses 1-11
- ❖ He repeats this advice during the reign of Zedekiah, and he gives a warning against the false prophets of his day – verses 12-22

ful words could be conveyed to the people. With only a few exceptions, they had become false prophets who only preached lies and false peace. Jeremiah warned King Zedekiah against these false prophets that were infesting the land. Some of the vessels of the Lord's house had already been carried away to Babylon, as part of the plunder in Nebuchadnezzar's recent visit to Jerusalem; and these false prophets were telling Zedekiah that those vessels would speedily be restored and brought back to Jerusalem, and that Nebuchadnezzar would soon cease to bear rule over them. But it was false! Yes, Nebuchadnezzar would certainly come back to Jerusalem and re-enter the city; but instead of any vessels being restored, the rest of those which were still left would then be carried away into Babylon also (verses 12-22). And as for the deceitful words of those false prophets who said, "Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon" (verse 14) – the truth (or lack thereof) in their predictions would soon be made plain for all to see. So what, then, was Zedekiah recommended to do? The prophet's advice to him and his people was, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live." If these people would submit to the king of Babylon, they would live; if they rebelled against him, they would die. This warning voice against the false prophets was clear, faithful, and decisive; but sadly, the people did not heed it.



Jeremiah's ministry was a hard and painful one, but it was a necessary ministry; and it must still be fulfilled by faithful ministers today, among all persons who are unconverted. If this ministry is omitted, much evangelism-effort will fail. Of what use are appeals to people to come to Jesus, until the sinner has been led to see the awful peril which he has incurred? Of what avail is it to extol the Balm of Gilead, until the soul has heard and accepted the diagnosis of its fatal condition? Of what advantage is it to offer a seat in the lifeboat, as long as the sailor is full of confidence in his rapidly-sinking ship, and unaware of its unseaworthy condition? Some of the most important responsibilities of the true servant of God are to destroy people's false confidence, to pull down their refuges of lies, and to show them the utter futility of venturing out upon the sea of eternity in any other vessel than that which Christ has launched from the cross of Calvary! The consolations of the Gospel are very beautiful; but they must be withheld until people have seen their real condition before God, and have been held over the mouth of the bottomless pit of their own sin. The greatest revivals always begin in a thorough preaching of the law, pressing home its demands upon the consciences of the ungodly. Nor is it enough to dwell in general denunciations; we must particularize until conscience cries, "Thou art the man!" Then – and only then – is the heart of a person truly broken and ready to receive the life-giving and healing gift of amazing grace, which the Lord Jesus freely offers!

Lord! In light of the awareness of false prophets who speak deceitful lies, we beseech Your Holy Spirit to be our Teacher, so that we may not be led astray! Amen.